

# KAMA'O

(*Myadestes myadestina*)

It has been suggested that the original name for the Hawaiian Thrush on all of the islands was 'Amaui, a contraction for "Manu a Maui," meaning the bird of the demigod Maui. The Kaua'i species, known as the Kāma'o, was the most common forest bird on the island in the 1890s. Today it is endangered, with an estimated population believed to be fewer than 100 birds.

**DISTRIBUTION:** Kāma'o are found in the most remote parts of the Alaka'i Swamp.

**DESCRIPTION:** Kāma'o are dull brown above, tinged with olive; under-parts are smoky gray and somewhat mottled. The bill and legs are dark. Sexes are similar and 8 inches in length.

**VOICE:** The song is a quiet melodious series of flute-like notes emitted while in flight or from perch in vegetation. Also, a "hissing" scold is used.

**NESTING:** Breeding biology is unknown. Observations of the nesting habits of the Hawai'i Thrush or 'Oma'o have revealed that nests composed of twigs, fern fronds, mosses, and leaves are often placed in protective hollows of 'ōhi'a trees.

**DIET:** Kāma'o feed primarily on fruits, berries, and seeds found in native 'ōhi'a forests. Insects and land snails also make up part of their diet.

**CONSERVATION NOTE:** Hawaiian Thrushes once inhabited all the main islands. The Big Island species, 'Oma'o, is still relatively common, the O'ahu species is extinct, and the Oloma'o is endangered on Moloka'i and extinct on Lāna'i. No Oloma'o have been found on Maui during intensive surveys, although recent fossil evidence indicates they once dwelled on the slopes of Haleakalā.

The drastic decline of this formerly common bird from the forests of Kauai is somewhat of a mystery. There are relatively pristine forests where the call of the Kāma'o is no longer heard. It has been hypothesized that avian diseases are responsible for their recent decline. Feeding habits of the Kāma'o took them to various elevations as they migrated to areas of food abundance. This habit may have rendered them more vulnerable to diseases.

The prospects for the long-term survival of the Kāma'o in the remote fog-covered forests of the Alaka'i Swamp are not promising. It may be that a captive breeding program could maximize their chances for survival. Such a program would be designed to increase their population by helping captive birds breed successfully and then releasing their offspring into native forest habitat.



Fewer than 100 Kāma'o survive in the Alaka'i, Kaua'i.  
—Painting by Sheryl Ives Boynton